**Individual rights vs. group rights**

**The insistence on group rights in America is killing individual rights--our most cherished principle.**

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The Declaration of Independence states that all men are created equal with rights that can’t be taken away. The Founding Fathers saw rights as given to individuals, not to groups. They thought the government should protect the rights of individuals.

However, by the mid-1990s, it was being suggested that America had become a nation where the rights of groups were more important than the rights of individuals. As evidence, the American Civil Liberties Union has switched its focus from the defense of individual rights to group rights.

All across the country, individual rights are being nibbled away. The use of cooperative learning in schools is an example. A National Middle School Association conference promoted cooperative learning as an “essential” classroom practice because it directs competition away from individual performance and toward a group identity.

The placing of the group over the individual was seen in one school’s report on the services for gifted students. Teachers objected to allowing gifted students to leave class for enrichment because these children “often provide a needed spark” for the rest of the students. In other words, in some school districts, the needs of the group is more important than allowing a gifted student to have his or her needs met. High-ability students are expected to sacrifice their opportunities to excel in order to serve the group needs.

This has become a movement to eliminate the recognition of individual achievements. As a result, in some schools, spelling bees and science fairs have been eliminated because individual recognition might harm the self-esteem of others.

Consider smoking in restaurants. The battle is between a group (nonsmokers) and individuals (restaurant owners). Nonsmokers declare that, as a group, they have the right to eat in a smoke-free restaurant. The problem with that argument is that no one is taking this right away. People can choose to eat at any restaurant they please, including places that don’t allow smoking.

The problem is that members of this group (nonsmokers) want all restaurants to prohibit smoking which is in conflict with the individuals who own restaurants, who argue that they should be able to run their places as they see fit--smoking or not. Nationwide, this group is winning and individuals are losing.

Even possible presidential candidates have made their views known on this topic. It is reported that when a woman complained to Hillary Clinton that she did not want to be forced into a health care plan that she didn’t choose, Hillary replied: “It’s time to put the common good, the national interest, ahead of individuals.”

The protection of individual rights, one of the important principles behind the founding of this nation, is now giving way to group rights.

So when school begins and you arrive at school with the special pens, pencils and notebooks you spent hours carefully selecting, don’t be surprised if they are dumped into a common bin for the use of all your classmates. This is just one more step in the long march toward wearing away the rights of individuals to support the supposed needs of the group.

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